DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 241 TM 001 055

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TITLE An Evaluation of the Humanities Program at Lord Byng Secondary School During 1970-71.
INSTITUTION Vancouver Board of School Trustees (British Columbia).
REPORT NO RR-71-17
PUB DATE Jul 71
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Course Evaluation; *Experimental Curriculum; Experimental Programs; *Humanities Instruction; Program Evaluation; Questionnaires; *Secondary Education; Social Studies; Student Attitudes; *Student Opinion; Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates an experimental humanities program combining English and Social Studies materials in which students discussed topics of social concern. Grade distributions, teacher complaints, planned improvements, and responses to a student questionnaire are examined. A copy of the questionnaire is included. (DLG)

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RESEARCH REPORT

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Introduction

During the first semester of the 1970-71 school year, an experimental Humanities program was offered to students at Lord Byng Secondary School. "Humanities 11" is a single semester course which is taken for credit to replace one semester of English 11 and one semester of Social Studies 11. The Humanities program was scheduled for 10 periods in each cycle of 35 periods from September, 1970 to January, 1971.

Humanities 11 Program

An English teacher and a Social Studies teacher conducted the Humanities 11 program. It was originally planned that both teachers would have an opportunity to observe each other's classes and to develop team teaching. As no allowance could be made for these provisions in the timetable, each teacher had little opportunity to relate to the ideas or materials that his colleague had undertaken. Of necessity, the Humanities 11 program became two courses.

Originally, it was planned that each student would be expected to read the book African Genesis. As some students found the book too difficult, both teachers agreed to modify their approach by having students discuss value-laden ideas. The onus shifted from the students' investigation of the book to the teachers who were required to present information for discussion.

Through a variety of approaches which included films, tapes, filmstrips, selected readings, guest speakers, consensus decision making and formal classroom presentations, students explored the following topics of social concern and interest.

(a) The nature of man - good or evil or good/evil
- man's place in the universe
- religion
- death

(b) The qualities of a good person - value systems today

(c) The nature of a fully functioning individual - Maslow

(d) The generation gap

(e) The social status or class in our society

(f) The role of the state in our society

(g) The race question - anti-semitism
- black man in America

(h) The poor people in our society - who is responsible
- welfare laws

As discussion of these topics was very open and permissive, there was no attempt to impose a value system on the students.

During the course each student was obliged to complete one major assignment and present it to the class. These assignments varied from a series of poems with annotated personal comments to a classroom musical presentation. Two independent observers from the Planning and Evaluation Department observed the reporting of a survey on elementary pupils' attitudes that had been conducted by a Humanities 11 student. A class discussion of the survey findings followed the presentation.

In addition to the major assignment, all students were required to write several short paragraphs, although emphasis was placed upon the day-to-day involvement and discussions of a wide range of topics.

In evaluating the achievement of Humanities 11 students, the teachers reached a consensus in assigning a single letter grade to each pupil for both parts of the course. Table I shows a distribution of students' letter grades for the first and second terms of the semester.

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF LETTER GRADES RECEIVED BY HUMANITIES 11 STUDENTS

Term	Letter Grades								Total Number of Students
	A	B	C+	C	C-	D	E	I	
First Term	3	3	9	3	4	-	-	-	22
Second Term	4	7	7	4	-	-	3	-	25

Evaluation of the Program

A student questionnaire prepared by the Planning and Evaluation Department was distributed to Humanities 11 students by one of their teachers. Appendix A contains the summarized comments from 13 student questionnaires (52% return). There are variations in the total number of responses per question as students sometimes wrote several responses to a particular question.

Problems Encountered by Teachers

Teachers listed the following problems in conducting the Humanities 11 program.

1. Excessive responsibilities for teachers

   There was considerable frustration as the teachers did not always know which direction the class wished to follow. Material which was not favourably received by the class was soon abandoned for other material, thus placing much pressure on the teachers for new content.

2. Students' fears of their peers

   Many students thrived on the genuine openness in the class. However, other students were threatened and would have been more secure in a structured group. Even though a vocal minority of students dominated the discussion, other students claimed to have benefited from the experience.

Future Plans for the Program

Next year the Humanities 11 program will be offered as two separate courses—one English program and one Social Studies program. The Social Studies section will have considerably more structure and teacher direction. Evaluation will be less subjective and based upon contracted assignments. Group consensus games will be continued. Students will also be encouraged to interpret, compare, and judge the values expressed in articles selected from the Holt Rinehart text (Humanities in Three Cities) and other sources.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE HUMANITIES 11 PROGRAM

Total Number of Questionnaires Returned = 13

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE HUMANITIES 11 PROGRAM

This questionnaire is designed to obtain your opinion of the experimental course entitled Humanities 11. The results of the questionnaire will not be used for marks or grading purposes. The questionnaires will be forwarded to the Vancouver School Board Department of Research for evaluating students' reactions toward the course.

As the response to the questionnaire is intended to be anonymous, you need not sign your name. Please be forthright in your answers to these questions.

1. Why did you decide to enroll in the Humanities 11 program?

   It seemed to be an interesting and meaningful experimental course to gain new knowledge and experience - 11
   The course was concerned with social issues - 2
   Interested in English and Social Studies as a combined course - 2

2. What did you expect to gain from taking this course?

   To learn how people live and how society functions - 6
   To gain a better understanding of teachers, fellow students, and myself - 5
   No response - 2

3. Do you think that the course was worthwhile? (Please check one response)

   Yes 13 No - No opinion -

   Why? / Why not?

   In the unstructured course students could become involved in what they believed was important - 7
   The course revealed many interesting fields of knowledge about people and their philosophies - 7
   Students had personal freedom to express their opinions in individual projects and hear others verbalize their ideas in discussions - 6

4. In what ways did the course measure up to your expectations?

   The course broadened students' reading background and knowledge - 6
   Discussions among teachers and students were very open and informative - 6
   No response - 1

5. In what ways did the course fall short of your expectations?

   Time was too brief to study and discuss in depth all of the material which the teachers presented - 5
   Some aimless discussion - 3
   Students became very involved and frustrated with each other in discussions - 2

Course did not interest all students - 2
Afraid to become involved with the discussion - 1
The program did not fall short of expectations - 2

6. Do you think that you gained more from this Humanities course than you would have from a regular course in Social Studies or English? (Please check one response)

Yes 11 No 1 No opinion - Yes and No 1

Why? / Why not?

Positive Comments - 14

The course provided more scope than a structured textbook oriented program and permitted us to work in interesting areas of knowledge - 10
Friendly relaxed classroom atmosphere with personal communication and understanding between teacher and student - 4

Negative Comments - 2

Although there were interesting materials and opportunities for self-expression in Humanities 11, extra-curricular participation was not adequate to make me satisfied that I had really learned much - 1
Only complaint is the limited time for the course - 1

7. What recommendations would you make to improve the course if it were offered next year?

Lengthen the time for the course to a full year - 4
Course content should be determined by the students and occasionally by the teacher - 4
Improve the organization and interrelation of the courses - 4
A topic presentation to the class should be mandatory unless the student feels completely incapable of handling it - 2
Should be more participation from some students - 2
Through seating arrangements and group projects, the formation of aggressive and subservient cliques might be avoided - 1
More formal lessons may provide students with a mutual background for discussion - 1
More guest speakers and field trips - 1
Give students time to investigate independently the topics about which they are especially curious - 1
Continue to emphasize the understanding of topics - 1
Need a warm-up period for students to adjust to the open-endedness of the unstructured program - 1
Advertise the nature of the Humanities program when students are considering their courses for the next school year - 1
Only accept students who are interested in Humanities and desire to participate in the program - 1
Assign one teacher to the program - 1